

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Approved in S
3/9/62

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: February 20, 1962

SUBJECT: Berlin

PARTICIPANTS: Belgium

United States

Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak
Ambassador Louis Scheyven
Counselor Jean de Bassompierre
Etienne Davignon, Aide to Mr. Spaak

The Secretary
William R. Tyler, Acting Assistant
Secretary, EUR
Robert H. Miller, WE
Sam Maggio, interpreter

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The Secretary said that the Thompson-Gromyko talks had shown neither progress nor retrogression on the Berlin question. He said the talks had also shown an apparent lack of Soviet interest in settling the Berlin question. He asked for Mr. Spaak's views as to the meaning of the Soviet stance, e.g., whether the Soviets were prepared to see the issue die down or whether they were convinced that they could not get the kind of agreement they wanted and thus intended to seek a separate peace treaty with East Germany. Mr. Spaak said he did not understand Soviet motives either. He said that, when Khrushchev had invited him to come to Moscow last September, he had thought Khrushchev was interested in a solution; but he agreed that now the Soviets seem no longer interested in one. He suggested that the recent Soviet overtures to the West Germans might mean the Soviets would seek progress on the Berlin issue by direct approaches to the Germans. On the other hand, he continued, the Soviet actions in the air corridors suggested that they wished to keep the Berlin issue alive. Ambassador Scheyven thought that the Russians might think West Berlin would sooner or later die on the vine and therefore all they had to do was wait. The Secretary replied that Mr. Brandt had said only that day that more people were moving into West Berlin than were moving out. The Secretary noted that West Berlin was offering incentives to young married couples to establish themselves there. The Secretary said he thought the puzzling Soviet actions resulted from: 1) internal Soviet-bloc difficulties over China, Albania, de-Stalinization, agriculture, etc.; and 2) confusion over the West's position (for example, over reports of breaches in NATO solidarity, increased U.S. defense spending, etc.).

The Secretary

The Secretary noted that the Soviets had not been willing to pursue certain issues which we had felt might also be discussed. Ambassador Thompson, for example, had said to Gromyko that the U.S. could not give the East German regime either de jure or de facto recognition. Gromyko responded that the United States already had given de facto recognition. Likewise, Gromyko had talked about respect for East German sovereignty, while the United States had no wish for its access rights to interfere with East Germany. The Secretary explained that on such points, the United States was willing to pursue the discussion to see if the issues involved could not be cleared up, but the Soviets had shown themselves unwilling to pursue such discussions. Nevertheless, the Secretary said, the U.S. had found the talks worthwhile for exploring positions. He observed that the Soviets must know the essentials of the Western position. He noted, also, that the Soviets were having a Central Committee meeting on March 5 where, presumably, there would be discussion of the Berlin question.

Mr. Spaak asked the Secretary whether the recent Soviet actions in the air corridors disturbed him. The Secretary replied that they had, mildly, because the Soviets must know that the United States would not accept restrictions on air access. He pointed out that air access was the only "uncensored" access to Berlin. He added that the U.S. was trying not to make it a prestige issue with the Soviets, in order to make it easier for them to cease their activity. Mr. Spaak noted that all NATO countries were firm in support of the United States on this issue. The Secretary said that the U.S. would have to react sharply to any Soviet interference in the air corridors. He observed that the Soviet actions could eventually erode the morale of those travelling by air to Berlin, but so far any such erosion was not important.

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